

Grace and Race in Galatians 6

discussion guide based on **Galatians 5:26-6:18** by Paul Thaxter
(linked to sermon of 23/7/23)
which can be accessed at www.stjamesbythepark.org/galatians

1. Introduction:

We are finishing the letter to the Galatians. Why not try to summarise the main message of this letter in your own words.

Paul's gospel is one of trust in the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is astonishing that Paul, once an orthodox zealous Jew who was very concerned with obedience to the law, should be so permissive in his instruction. He encourages Christian believers to trust and follow Jesus the Christ, whom God has entrusted to bring salvation to all of humankind. God's Holy Spirit will guide them. Wow – as we trust in this gospel we will fulfil the law of Christ – by loving God and each other. The Jewish Law/Torah has 613 laws in it but Paul the apostle reduces everything to its essence.

How would you summarise the Christian experience/message without the religious jargon?

Would someone like to describe their conversion to Christ to the group?

2. Read Galatians 5:25-26

²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

For Paul the gospel of Jesus Christ has implications for how we relate to each other in Christian community.

If conceit is thinking too much of ourselves in some way – would we be aware of it?

Provoking and envying of each other - Have we ever been the victim of such comments or behaviours and why? Have we ever been guilty of it and why?

In what ways does the gospel stop us being superior or inferior to others?

C. S. Lewis said "humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less." Discuss.

As you read Galatians 6:1 what do you think it means to be caught in a sin?

How do you gently restore someone who is caught in a sin?

3. Read Galatians 6:2-5

²Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. ³If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. ⁴Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, ⁵for each one should carry their own load.

What is a burden? Can you describe different burdens that people face in SJP and wider Shirley?

Does v 2 contradict or contrast with the statement that each person should carry their own load?

What is the difference between a burden and a load?

Is it healthy to have a pride in yourself?

4. Read Galatians 6:6

⁶Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

What do you think it means to share all good things mean? Is it simply saying, “nice sermon vicar!”
Discuss

NB. It is important in bible study to follow the “logic” or the “flow “of the author. Here Paul is talking about carrying each other’s burdens but also carrying your own load. He was fully aware that he had sacrificed much to share the good news with them and was often dependent on people to feed him or house him – such was his humility for the sake of the gospel. Leading Christian communities is very challenging, often unrewarding, sometimes very satisfying, and it can feel at times like herding cats...I say that from experience. What I think Paul the apostle is advocating here is an encouragement for a community to look after the people that have a form of spiritual oversight over that community. Take care of them. They are carrying the burden of the church community as well as their own load. They may have little income or time for entertainment. They often have to face differences of opinion and disagreements amongst community members, spoken or silent ones.

5. Read Galatians 6:7-10

⁷Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Most of us live in the city so what resonance does this agricultural metaphor have in our lives?

What are you sowing in your life? Do you think v7-8 is always true to life?

Do you think that the church could be likened to a co-operative farm? If so, what are we actually harvesting?

If we prioritise “the family of believers” are we just reinforcing the church as a club or as an alternative healthy community?

People are often bombarded with many needs in the world and some develop “compassion fatigue” as a means of coping. What tips can you share about not growing weary in doing good?

Read Galatians 6:11

¹¹See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand! - What do you think is the significance of this verse? Why write it at this section of the letter?

6. Read Galatians 6:12- 15

¹²Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.

¹³Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. ¹⁴May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

¹⁵Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.

Clearly, Paul the apostle is revealing the motives of the false teachers – their desire for popularity and success. In your experience has such a desire by spiritual leaders for popularity and success been helpful or harmful? Which leaders inspire you and which have disappointed you?

The contrast between observing the law (e.g. circumcision) and the yielding to the crucified life is stark. Gal 6:14 is an astonishing declaration of intentional discipleship. What does v14 mean to you?

Is the “world” dead to you or very much alive in your life?

How do you consider you are part of a new creation?

7. Read Galatians 6:16-18

¹⁶Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God. ¹⁷From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. ¹⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

As Paul concludes what words strike you as important. What is Paul trying to convey or stress to the Christians in Galatia?

8. On reflection:

Did you enjoy studying this series on Galatians? Do you prefer topical subjects or a sustained exegesis of a particular book in the bible or a combination?

Do you want to study any particular books in the bible and why?

What recommendations do you want to propose for the future teaching ministry of St James by the Park?

Thank you for being committed to reading and studying the letter to the Galatians together – may we all continue grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul the apostle concludes his letter with a blessing for them and for us today. ¹⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.